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19 August 1961

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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CONTENTS

25X1

- [Redacted]
- 2. Tunisia: Bourguiba calls for demonstrations in Bizerte which may spark new hostilities. (Page tv)

25X1



25X1

Next 5 Page(s) In Document Exempt

*Tunisia: President Bourguiba's call for demonstrations inside French-occupied Bizerte prior to the opening of the 21 August special General Assembly on the Bizerte crisis resulted in unsuccessful attempts by several hundred Tunisians to force their way into the French-controlled sector on the night of 18 August. In asking for the demonstrations, Bourguiba may have hoped for grass-roots endorsement of his methods of dealing with the Bizerte crisis and of himself as Tunisia's unchallenged leader.

No

25X1

[redacted] experienced Tunisian guerrilla fighters are being retrained for hit-and-run operations against the French in Bizerte should fighting be resumed.] [redacted] (Backup, Page 5)

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

19 Aug 61

DAILY BRIEF

iv

25X1

Next 5 Page(s) In Document Exempt

The Bizerte Situation

Ever since the extent of Tunisian casualties during the four days of clashes at Bizerte in mid-July became public knowledge, private and public criticism of Bourguiba has mounted, and political observers generally have considered that his capacity to act decisively and hold the confidence of the people appeared to be crumbling. [Bourguiba appears to be aware of this reaction; at least one leader of a potential opposition has been arrested for publicly criticizing the government's handling of the crisis.]

[] the governing body of the Tunis lawyers' association has been abruptly dissolved and replaced, and that as a result the legal fraternity is talking of the need for an opposition movement.

[] many critics of the regime are found among lawyers, especially employees of the Ministry of Justice who were there when Salah ben Youssef--Bourguiba's archrival who was assassinated in Germany on 13 August--headed that ministry from mid-1950 to early 1952, prior to independence. Rumors are reported to be circulating among "opposition circles" that Ben Youssef's assassination was ordered by Bourguiba.]

Although Bourguiba threatened that his army would go into action if French forces fired at the demonstrators, the several thousand Tunisian forces concentrated outside the French-held city of Bizerte are armed only with light weapons and are no more able to battle French units than were the mixed gendarmer-military-civilian groups which clashed with the French in mid-July.

The French forces can be expected to avoid armed clashes if possible. Renewed fighting would complicate implementation of the reported 17 August decision by the French Defense Committee to earmark as part of the planned crisis build-up of French forces in Europe two of the regiments rushed to Bizerte

in July. The withdrawal of two regiments would enable De Gaulle to reduce tension over Bizerte without incurring an adverse reaction from his political and military opponents who hope to exploit any sign of weakness in his handling of either the Tunisian or Algerian situation.

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25X1

[redacted] French ground forces at Bizerte were increased from about 2,400 to approximately 4,100 as a result of the hostilities in July, but a marine infantry regiment--estimated at 700 men--reportedly was withdrawn to Algeria earlier this week. [redacted]

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